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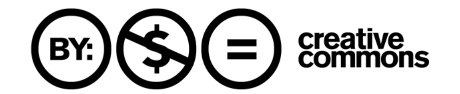
A New Look at the Byzantine Sanctuary Barrier

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Abstract

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Ch. Walter, A New Look al the Byzantine Sanctuary Barrier. — Profiting from the numerous studies of the subject published over the last two decades, the author attempts to establish with more precision what was the purpose of the Byzantine sanctuary barrier. While it effectively prevented the laity from entering the sanctuary and even from observing what took place there, it was also intended to be the focal point of lay piety. The lower icons were accessible to the laity for veneration. The icons on the architrave or epistyle were destined to nourish their meditation during the celebration of the liturgy. The Deësis recalled the necessity of the intercession of the saints. The Twelve Feasts provided a selection from the redemptive acts of Christ's life, analogous to the mysteries of the Roman Catholic rosary. Thus the purpose of the imagery of the sanctuary barrier was primarily to respond to the needs of lay devotion. It had its specific function independent of the programmes developed on the walls of Byzantine churches.



A NEW LOOK AT THE BYZANTINE SANCTUARY BARRIER

Christopher WALTER *

The *Liturgical Commentary* of Pseudo-Sophronius contains a passage about the sanctuary barrier of the Byzantine church [1]. It is, in fact, an adaptation of a text in the *Historia ecclesiastica* [2]: "The entablature is made in accordance with canonical and holy ornamentation, a manifestation of the crucified Christ, the image represented by the Cross."

Sophronius continues by comparing the balustrade to the surroundings of Christ's tomb. He also follows the *Historia ecclesiastica* in attributing to the barrier the function of separating the sanctuary, to which only the clergy is admitted, from the nave, but he omits a sentence about the laity coming to the barrier to pray (τὸ μὲν ἔξωθεν τοῦ βήματος ναόν, τὴν εἴσοδον καὶ παράστασιν τοῦ λαοῦ τοῦ εἰσερχομένου εἰς προσευχήν). However, he adds a mystagogical interpretation of the *solea*, the space between the sanctuary and the nave, as a river of fire separating sinners from the just. This is a more startlingly radical separation than that which would be proposed later by Symeon of Thessaloniki

* This article owes its origin to a suggestion made by Robin Cormack in 1990 that I update my earlier study, The Origins of the Iconostasis, *Eastern Churches Review* 3, 1971, p. 251-267 (reprinted, *Studies in Byzantine Iconography* III, Variorum, London 1977). Versions of it have been read at the Centre for Greek, Latin and Roman Studies, Prague (February 1991), at the University of Rethymnon (May 1991) and the Jagellonski University, Cracow (October 1992). I refer back only occasionally to bibliography earlier than that listed by M. CHATZIDAKIS, Ikonostas, *Reallexikon zur byzantinischen Kunst*, III, Stuttgart 1972, columns 325-353. Questions of terminology are treated in my paper, The Byzantine Sanctuary — A Word List, to appear in *Liturgy, Architecture and Art of the Byzantine Church*, edited C. AKENTIEV, Sankt Peterburg.

1. *PG* 87^3, 389^d-392^a (*CPG* 7677). For Pseudo-Sophronius (Sophronius II before 1059 - after 1064, or Sophronius III after 1235 - before 1273?), see R. BORNERT, *Les commentaires byzantins de la divine liturgie*, Paris 1966, p. 210-211.

2. *PG* 98, 389^d-392^a (*CPG* 8023).

between the clergy concerned with the spiritual and the intelligence and the laity concerned with the material and the senses[3].

In two of his letters, Nicetas Stethatus interprets the words of the deacon: "The doors, the doors, attention to the doors!"[4]. He rejects out of hand the view that this was an invitation to the laity to approach the altar, in order to observe what was happening there. On the contrary, the interior of the sanctuary was reserved to the clergy; monks had their place around the sanctuary; the laity stood far back. "How can the layman, to whom it is forbidden, contemplate from such a distance the mysteries of God accomplished with trembling by his priests?" During the anaphora, the senses should be closed like doors, to prevent any wandering of the intelligence and to exclude irrelevant thoughts from the heart. In order to make doubly sure that the laity could see nothing during the anaphora, a curtain might be suspended around the altar, which concealed even the priests who were celebrating.

It does not seem that things were always like that. In fact the early Christian sanctuary was designed to be visible to the laity, which was only separated from the clergy, as from the officials in other public buildings, by low panels placed between squat pillars. These were later raised to carry an architrave, but, unless curtains were hung from the architrave, the liturgy continued to be visible to the laity[5]. Moreover, for centuries the prayers of the anaphora were recited out loud[6]. No special terms were invented at first for the component parts of the sanctuary barrier; the current words in use for similar barriers in other public buildings were taken over. The decoration was also similar to that in profane buildings. The plaques on top of the low pillars were carved with a profane subject: a figure on horseback spearing an animal, archers shooting deer, bucolic scenes, although with these orant figures also occasionally appeared[7]. The use of profane subjects to decorate the sanctuary barrier was still current in the ninth century when the patriarch Nicephorus wrote his dialogue with an Iconoclast about the purpose of representations of animals on the sanctuary barrier and on veils[8].

3. *De sacro templo* 136, *PG* 155, 345c.

4. NICÉTAS STÉTHATOS (*ca* 1000 - *ca* 1081), *Opuscules et lettres*, edited J. DARROUZÈS, Paris 1961, n° 3, p. 232-235; n° 8, p. 280-291.

5. J.-P. SODINI & K. KOLOKOTSAS, *Aliki* II, Paris 1984, p. 26-50.

6. P. TREMBELAS, L'audition de l'Anaphore eucharistique par le peuple, *L'Église et les églises*, II, Chevetogne 1955, p. 207-220.

7. A. GRABAR, *Sculpture byzantine de Constantinople (IVe-Xe siècle)*, Paris 1963, p. 76-80, plates 26-33; N. FIRATLI, *La sculpture byzantine figurée au musée archéologique d'Istanbul*, catalogue revu par C. METZGER, A. PRALONG & J.-P. SODINI, Paris 1990, nos 278-297. Apparently similar objects are found in many other places.

8. See below, note 18.

The changes which occurred subsequently are part of a much wider movement embracing the liturgy and religious art in general[9]. Yet perhaps a first symptom of later developments may be detected in Sozomenus's celebrated account of the conflict between bishop Ambrose of Milan and the emperor Theodosius[10]. Ambrose denied the emperor, a layman, the right to take a place within the sanctuary (ἱερατεῖον, perhaps the only Christian neologism in the early centuries for this part of the church). Emperors did, of course, regularly enter the sanctuary on ceremonial occasions, and even Nicolas Stethatus recognized their right to do so[11]. However, Ambrose was excluding the emperor as a *layman*. Thus the reservation of the sanctuary to the clergy was already being asserted in the fifth century.

If the notion of the liturgy as a divine mystery entrusted to the clergy probably originates with Dionysius the Areopagite, it was subsequently developed by Maximus the Confessor[12] and applied to the exegesis of liturgical texts, replacing or supplementing earlier typological interpretation[13]. The liturgy was understood as a re-enactment of Christ's terrestrial life from the Annunciation to the Ascension and the sending of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. The influence of this notion on church decorative programmes has recently been set forth by J.-M. Spieser, but not extended to the decoration of the sanctuary barrier. As A. W. Epstein had written earlier, "the area in the immediate vicinity of the altar was programmatically significant in the Byzantine church"[14]. However she did not explore its significance in detail.

9. Numerous sensitive studies of this subject have been published recently, notably J.-M. SPIESER, Liturgie et programmes iconographiques, *TM* 11, 1991, p. 575-590. Besides the bibliographical references given by Spieser, see N. THON, Zur Entwicklungsgeschichte der Ikonostase und ihrer theologischen Fondierung, *Hermeneia. Zeitschrift für ostkirchlichen Kunst* 2, 1986, p. 193-207; H.-J. SCHULZ, *The Byzantine Liturgy. Symbolic Structure and Faith Expression*, New York 1986, English translation of *Die byzantinische Liturgie*, Freiburg im Breisgau[1] 1964, Trier[2] 1980; A. CAMERON, The Language of Images; the Rise of Icons and Christian Representation, *The Church and the Arts*, edited D. WOOD, Oxford 1992, p. 1-42.

10. SOZOMENUS, *Historia ecclesiastica* (*CPG* 6030) VII 24, *PG* 67, 1496[b].

11. STÉTHATOS, *op. cit.* (note 4), p. 282-283.

12. V. L. DUPONT, Le dynamisme de l'action liturgique. Une étude de la mystagogie de saint Maxime le Confesseur, *Revue des sciences religieuses* 65, 1991, p. 363-388. SCHULZ, *op. cit.* (note 9), first edition, p. 39-44, suggests rather Theodore of Mopsuestia as the first to interpret the liturgy mystagogically.

13. BORNERT, *op. cit.* (note 1); Ch. WALTER, *Art and Ritual of the Byzantine Church*, London 1982, p. 189-192. SPIESER, *art. cit.* (note 9), p. 587 note 63, slightly misrepresents my approach. I would sum up Early Christian apse iconography as an adaptation of imperial imagery combined with Old Testament typological scenes.

14. A. W. EPSTEIN, The Middle Byzantine Sanctuary Barrier: Templon or Iconostasis?, *Journal of the British Archaeological Association* 134, 1981, p. 23.

I shall attempt to do just this in the present article. A first impression might be that, at least during the Byzantine epoch, there was more liberty and less systematisation in the decoration of the sanctuary barrier and the adjacent walls than in the rest of the church. This impression may be due partly to the fact that the decoration of the sanctuary barriers, like their architectural structure, could be — and frequently was — modified, so that not only do they have a heterogeneous appearance but also it is difficult to date with precision the stages in their development. On the other hand, as I shall argue here, these heterogeneous elements derive from a common motivation. Since the laity was progressively excluded from a direct view of the mysteries enacted within, the decoration of the sanctuary barrier at once provided a substitute for this direct view and offered a focal point for more personal devotional practices.

Our concrete evidence for the decoration of the sanctuary barrier with figures of Christ, the Mother of God or saints before Iconoclasm is, by the nature of things, sparse. Besides the well-known description by Paul the Silentiary of the sanctuary barrier of Saint Sophia, which would have been decorated with a considerable number of figures of the heavenly court [15], there is a valuable reference in the *Miracula* of Saint Artemius, recently brought to light by C. Mango [16]. In the church of Saint John the Baptist, where Saint Artemius performed his healing miracles, there were, somewhere on the sanctuary barrier, designated here for the first time by the term *templon* [17], icons of Christ, Saint John the Baptist and Saint Artemius. The text dates from the second half of the seventh century.

15. Ch. Walter, Further Notes on the Deësis, *REB* 28, 1970, p. 171-181, reprinted *Studies in Byzantine Iconography* II, Variorum, London 1977.

16. C. Mango, On the History of the Templon and the Martyrion of St. Artemios at Constantinople, *Zograf* 10, 1979, p. 40-43. For the date of the *Miracula*, see J. Grosdidier de Matons, Les Miracula sancti Artemii. Note sur quelques questions de vocabulaire, *Mémorial André-Jean Festugière*, edited E. Lucchesi & H. D. Saffrey, Geneva 1984, p. 263 (between 659 and 668); V. Déroche, L'authenticité de l'Apologie contre les Juifs de Léontius de Néapolis, *BCH* 110, 1986, p. 658-659. A new edition has been proposed by V. Déroche & M. Lassithiotakis.

17. For the term *templon*, see my word list cited above. The word occurs in the *Life* of Philip of Argyrion, which the latest editor, C. Pasini, *Vita di S. Filippo d'Agira attribuita al monaco Eusebio*, Rome 1981, attributes to the ninth or tenth century, p. 133 note 50, p. 136 § 7, line 115. Ch. Giros, Remarques sur l'architecture monastique en Macédoine orientale, *BCH* 116, 1992, p. 409-443, notes three further examples of the word *templon*. It is further inscribed on an architrave in the Byzantine Museum, Athens: [τέ]μπλον ἐξη[ει]ργά[σατο], G. Sotiriou, *Ὀδηγὸς Βυζαντινοῦ Μουσείου Ἀθηνῶν*, Athens 1931, p. 75, n° 285 (figure 1). See also I. Papangelos, Η σημασία του όρου «τέμπλον» κατά τους 11ον-13ον αιώνες, *Έβδομο συμπόσιο της Χριστιανικής Αρχαιολογικής Εταιρείας*, Athens 1987, p. 55-56.

The passage from Nicephorus's *Antirrheticus*, to which allusion was made above, has often been quoted [18]. While it is mainly concerned with the use of profane imagery, which was not an object of veneration, to decorate the sanctuary barrier, it does imply that sacred imagery, which *was* an object of veneration, was also present, although only the icon of Christ is specifically mentioned. Less often quoted is the brief account of a similar discourse attributed to Nicephorus by George Hamartolus [19]. It begins with a justification of the making of sacred objects, including churches and liturgical vessels, on the grounds that this had been done from the earliest times. The passage continues:

> "Indeed even the Gospel bindings [20] carry on the outside sacred representations, which are venerated by Christians along with the Gospel. As for the divine columns and the socalled *soleae* [21], which wall off the venerable part, the sacred altar, they have been decorated from early on in holy fashion at that place for no other reason except that they may be venerated along with the representation of the Cross which is placed there with them."

The passage is interesting for several reasons. First of all, the separation of the sanctuary from the rest of the church is formal. The word διατειχίζουσι is fairly strong. Secondly Nicephorus is one of the earliest witnesses to the term *solea* [22], which was evidently a recent neologism,

18. NICEPHORUS, *Antirrheticus* III 45, *PG* 100, 464^{c}-465^{b}. A. GRABAR, L'esthétisme d'un théologien humaniste byzantin du IX^{e} siècle, *L'art de la fin de l'Antiquité et du Moyen Âge*, I, Paris 1968, p. 63-69; M. CHATZIDAKIS, L'évolution de l'icône aux 11^{e}-13^{e} siècles et la transformation du templon, *XV^{e} congrès international d'études byzantines. Rapports et corapports*, III, *Art et archéologie*, Athens 1976, p. 160-161; WALTER, *art. cit.* (note 15), p. 178; E. KITZINGER, Byzantine Art in the Period Between Justinian and Iconoclasm, *Berichte zum XI. Internationalen Byzantinisten-Kongress*, Munich 1958, p. 42, reprinted, *The Art of the Medieval West*, edited W. E. KLEINBAUER, Bloomington/London 1976, p. 198; J.-P. SODINI, Une iconostase byzantine à Xanthos, *Actes du colloque sur La Lycie antique*, Paris 1980, p. 134.

19. GEORGE HAMARTOLUS, *Chronicon* IV, edited C. DE BOOR, Leipzig 1904, II, p. 786 line 23 - p. 787 line 5. The text differs slightly in Muralt's edition, *PG* 110, 993^{a}. I thank Joseph Munitiz for helping me to establish the translation.

20. πτυχαί. For this word, see B. ATSALOS, *La terminologie du livre-manuscrit à l'époque byzantine*, Thessaloniki 1971, chapter 13.

21. αἱ σολία καλουμέναι.

22. The word is first attested as meaning the space between the nave and the sanctuary in THEOPHANES, *Chronographia*, edited C. DE BOOR, Leipzig 1883, p. 441 line 9 (810-814). See my word list cited above. The practice of calling the jutting entrance to the sanctuary of Early Christian churches a *solea*, e.g. R. KRAUTHEIMER, *Early Christian and Byzantine Architecture*^{4}, Harmondsworth 1986, p. 520, has no justification in Byzantine usage. P. LEMERLE, *Philippes et la Macédoine orientale*, Paris 1945, p. 362, writes more prudently of "un couloir étroit ... fermé par une porte", without attributing a name to it.

to designate the space between the nave and the sanctuary which Pseudo-Sophronius would later liken to a river of fire. Thirdly the sanctuary barrier was a place where images were placed for veneration. There is no reference to profane imagery, and decoration which was intended for veneration must have been figural. Unfortunately Nicephorus gives us no specific information as to subjects of these images.

In fact, no sacred image, intended for veneration, and definitely attached to the sanctuary barrier has survived from the pre-Iconoclast period. R. M. Harrison prudently does not commit himself about the bas-reliefs, all about 37 cm. high and all mutilated, which were found in the course of excavations at Saint Polyeuctus, Constantinople[23]. Christ, the Virgin and Child and apostles were represented, and it is a tempting hypothesis that they were mutilated by the Iconoclasts. The subjects are in conformity with what is known of pre-Iconoclast decoration of sanctuary barriers. Further one cannot go.

Our meagre conclusions can therefore only be drawn from the literary sources. It can be affirmed that sacred images did decorate the sanctuary barrier as early as the sixth century. The only subjects named are Christ, the Mother of God, saints and angels. In the second half of the seventh century, such images, placed on the sanctuary barrier in the church of Saint John the Baptist, where Saint Artemius worked his miracles, received veneration. It can also be affirmed that the process of "sacralisation" was well under weigh. The sanctuary was walled off, but Germanus tells us that the laity came there to pray, and Nicephorus tells us of the holy decorations at the sanctuary barrier, presumably icons to which prayers were addressed. This suggests that the sanctuary barrier, which now received a specific name, *templon*, like the space separating it from the nave, *solea*, had already become the focal point for personal, non-liturgical piety, that is the veneration of icons. We do have concrete evidence that the space adjacent to the sanctuary had already been invaded by icons. The pillar on which are represented the Virgin Paraclesis and Saint Theodore in Saint Demetrius, Thessaloniki, is close to the former emplacement of the sanctuary barrier[24]. In post-Iconoclast churches,

23. R. M. Harrison, *A Temple for Byzantium. The Discovery and Excavation of Anicia Juliana's Palace-Church in Istanbul*, University of Texas 1989, p. 109, fig. 136-142. There are no clues as to the original emplacement of these reliefs.

24. I am now inclined to look on this mosaic as a pre-Iconoclast artefact, Ch. Walter, Bulletin of the Deësis and Paraclesis, *REB* 38, 1980, p. 266. For earlier bibliography, see Idem, Two Notes on the Deësis, *REB* 26, 1968, p. 323 note 52, reprinted, *op. cit.* (note 15). R. Cormack, *The Church of Saint Demetrius: The Watercolours and*

the Virgin Paraclesis would regularly be represented on the north column adjacent to the sanctuary barrier.

By the tenth century it is clear that a standardized, if not universal, structure existed for the sanctuary barrier. It stretched across the central and possibly the two side apses. On either side of the doors there were panels placed between columns, which carried an architrave. While in many cases, as, for example, at Skripou [25], only a theoretical reconstruction can be envisaged from the surviving fragments, other sanctuary barriers have been convincingly restored [26]. In one case, in the church of Episkopi, Santorini, the sanctuary barrier has conserved its pristine structure. Orlandos's description of it is exact and detailed, but his calculation of the date of the church from the now lost inscription was wrong [27]. It has now been corrected. The church was built not by Alexius I Comnenus in 1081 but by Alexius II Comnenus in 1181 [28]. The rich decoration resembles that used in illuminated manuscripts from the late eleventh but more particularly in the twelfth century (figure 3). Consequently, from the point of view of style, the later date is more plausible. Birds are represented on the capitals either side of a fountain; crosses have been used abundantly on the lower part of the columns and the panels between them. However there are no portraits, while the icons of the epistyle (recently stolen) were much later in date.

Curiously, while the front of the barrier, facing towards the nave of the church, was meticulously and exquisitely decorated, the back, facing towards the sanctuary, was left completely unadorned. The stone from which the architrave was made has not even been cut straight (figure 2). It would follow, in this case at least, that the side

Drawings of W.S. George. Catalogue of exhibition organized by the British Council, Thessaloniki 1985, n° 42, p. 72, reprinted *The Byzantine Eye* II, Variorum, London 1989, regards the date as still controversial.

25. A. H. S. MEGAW, The Skripou Screen, *Annual of the British School of Athens* 61, 1968, p. 1-32, is a paradigm for this sort of reconstruction; EPSTEIN, *art. cit.* (note 14), p. 11.

26. CHATZIDAKIS, Iconostas, 331-336, gives a list of Byzantine sanctuary barriers in more or less good state of conservation. Add: the church of Zoodochos Pigis (formerly Saint Mary of Egypt) with a decorated architrave and framed icons, K. KALOKYRIS, *Βυζαντιναί ἐκκλησίαι τῆς Ἱερᾶς Μητροπόλεως Μεσσηνίας*, Thessaloniki 1983, p. 64-69, fig. 22-25; P. MILJKOVIĆ-PEPEK, *Veljusa*, Skopje 1981, p. 134-138; P. GEORGIEV, Manastirskata c'rkva pri s. Ravna, Probdijsko, *Izvestija na narodnija musej, Varna* 21 (36), 1985, p. 71-98.

27. A. K. ORLANDOS, Ἡ Ἐπισκοπὴ τῆς Σαντορήνης, *Ἀρχεῖον τῶν Βυζαντινῶν Μνημείων τῆς Ἑλλάδος* 7, 1951, p. 194-198.

28. A. TSITOURIDOU, Επισκοπή Σαντορίνης. Ίδρυμα του Αλεξίου Α' Κομνηνού ή του Β'; *Αμητός, τιμητικός τόμος για τον καθηγητή Μανόλη Ανδρόνικο*, II, Thessaloniki 1987, p. 917-921. I thank Mme Baltoyanni for drawing my attention to this article.

of the sanctuary barrier facing towards the laity was considered to be more important than that which faced towards the clergy celebrating the mysteries[29].

The special case of the Cappadocian sanctuary barriers has been assiduously studied in recent years[30]. Their construction, as is evident, posed special problems, since they had to be carved out of the rock. While they vary considerably both in style and quality, it seems that those who carved them accepted the free-standing marble barrier as a paradigm. At Açik Saray no. 3, for example, imitation columns and a decorated architrave have been carved in the rock[31]. The group which has high panels either side of the entrance to the sanctuary, with only a small aperture, placed too high to admit of a direct view inside, may have been an eleventh-century development[32]. Wallace has noted that at Göreme these chapels with a high screen are usually associated with a refectory. It might be suggested, as a virtually gratuitous hypothesis, that since Göreme was a centre of pilgrims, the high sanctuary barrier was intended to prevent them from prying too inquisitively at the execution of the mysteries within.

It is unlikely that these high sanctuary barriers in Cappadocia represent a stage in the development towards the later screens which entirely blocked the view. They should also be dissociated from the group of sanctuary barriers where the gaps above the panels have been blocked with masonry, leaving no aperture above, and then overpainted with icons.

It is usual to distinguish between the stone architrave which was placed on the columns of the sanctuary barrier and the beam or epistyle, usually made of wood, which surmounted it. A certain number of stone architraves has survived, upon which portraits have been carved. Most of them have been found in Asia Minor, but they exist also in Athens and Thebes as well as on Chios[33]. Orlandos was prepared to date the example in Thebes as early as the ninth cen-

29. I thank M^me^ Drossoyanni, director of the ephoria for the Byzantine monuments of the Cyclades, for obtaining permission for me from the Ministry of Culture to study and photograph this sanctuary barrier.

30. L. Rodley, *Cave Monasteries of Byzantine Cappadocia*, Cambridge 1985; A. Wharton, *Art of Empire*, University Park/London 1988; S. A. Wallace has kindly allowed me to consult her doctoral dissertation, *Byzantine Cappadocia, the Planning and Function of Its Ecclesiastical Structures*, Canberra 1991.

31. Rodley, *op. cit.*, fig. 130.

32. Notably, but not exclusively, in the area of Göreme, chapels 25, 27, 20, 19, 17, *Ibidem*, p. 169, 172, 175, 176, 181. Rodley's suggestion for dating, p. 235. Wharton, *op. cit.* (note 30), p. 133, calls attention to a high sanctuary barrier at Santa Barbara, Madera.

33. Sodini, *art. cit.* (note 18), p. 131-134.

tury[34] (figure 4). However, the earliest example which is securely dated is at Atyon Karahisar (938). The most common subject is the Deësis (by which I mean Christ between the Mother of God and the Prodromos), although other saints, including patron saints, may also be represented[35].

Scholars have usually assumed that these portraits carved in stone are earlier than those on the epistyle, which superseded them. However, Epstein has proposed another interpretation. The carved architraves would be an inferior provincial substitute for the more sophisticated epistyles made in Constantinople. "In this context, the imposition on history of a linear development from simple and crude to complex and refined has little foundation"[36].

One could object that the carved architraves would have looked much less crude before they lost their inlaid colouring. Furthermore, there is little foundation for Epstein's alternative interpretation. She can, indeed, cite the case of Basil I's church of Christ the Saviour (867-886), which had a gold architrave decorated with several portraits of Christ in enamel[37]. This is difficult to visualise unless one supposes that these portraits (ἡ θεανδρικὴ τοῦ κυρίου μορφή) were actually scenes from Christ's life. However we have no other evidence that such scenes were represented on the architrave or epistyle as early as the ninth, or even the tenth century. Weitzmann's attribution of an ivory diptych of the Presentation to an epistyle is hypothetical, even improbable[38].

It is certain that the practice of carving clipeate portraits on the architrave declined after the practice of placing a painted epistyle on top of it became general, although there are some surviving examples of later figurative decoration on architraves as in the church of the

34. A. K. Orlandos, *Ἀρχεῖον τῶν Βυζαντινῶν Μνημείων τῆς Ἑλλάδος* 5, 1939-1940, p. 126-128.

35. A. Cutler, Under the Sign of the Deësis: On the Question of Representativeness in Medieval Art and Literature, *DOP* 41, 1987, p. 145-154. Cutler adduces, p. 147, the interesting example of a monk dying before an icon of Christ with the Mother of God and the archangel Michael in prayer (εἰς δέησιν). Cutler does not mention that the archangel Michael was the psychopomp *par excellence*. (*Life* of Lazarus the Galesiote, *BHG* 979.) I refrain from further comment, since I agree with Cutler, p. 146, that the Deësis may be suffering from a crisis of over-explanation.

36. Epstein, *art. cit.* (note 14), p. 23, note 92.

37. *Ibidem*, p. 6.

38. K. Weitzmann, Diptih slonovoj kosti iz Ermitaza otnosjashchijsja k krugu imperatora Romana, *VV* 32, 1971, p. 142-156, reprinted (in English), *Byzantine Book illuminations and Ivories*, Variorum, London 1980. As I wrote in my review, *REB* 39, 1981, p. 354-355, it is difficult to imagine how some Festival scenes, for example the Nativity or the Anastasis, could be adapted for representation on a diptych.

Blachernai near Arta[39] and in Thebes Museum (figure 5). The architrave from a church at Xanthos, recently published by Sodini, may also be adduced. He dates it between 1050 and 1150. It is decorated with a developed Deësis, but at some time it was raised and holes were drilled in it. Sodini has suggested that this was done in order to hold an epistyle beam in place[40].

In fact the question whether or not there was "linear development" is of secondary importance, because in either case the programme would have been the same: a Deësis more or less extensive. More important is surely the question of the function of this Deësis. These portraits can hardly have been intended for veneration, because they were too small and too inaccessible. It is more likely that they were intended to set forth in the form of a synthesis the Church's doctrine of intercession. While the clergy was celebrating the liturgy on the other side of the sanctuary screen, the laity was encouraged to address prayers to the saints, notably to those whose icons below were certainly intended to be venerated.

Fortunately these icons were sometimes painted on the walls[41]. Consequently they have remained in their original place. Also they are easy to recognize. They were often painted larger in scale than other portraits and framed. Although they were not necessarily associated with the sanctuary screen, the columns to the north and south of it were customary places to paint them. Favorite subjects were the Virgin Paraklesis on the north column, facing Christ on the south one, the Virgin and Child and the patron saint of the church.

There did not seem to be an overriding prohibition that these icons should invade the sanctuary screen, the apertures of which were then filled with masonry and painted over. On one of the earliest ones, at the Evangelistria, Geraki, there are simply four icons: Saints George and Panteleimon flanking the Virgin and Child and Christ[42]. In the

39. Sodini, *art. cit.* (note 18), p. 133-134, with other examples from the 13th century.

40. *Ibidem*, p. 131.

41. G. Babić, O živopisanom ukrasu oltarskih pregrada, *Zbornik za likovne umetnosti* 11, 1975, p. 3-49. See also E. Kourkoutidou-Nikolaïdou, Το σπήλαιο των Αγίων Θεοδώρων, *Byzantinische Forschungen* 14, p. 279-302. In this rock church in northern Greece, the Annunciation is painted on the sanctuary barrier with above it a series of portraits of the apostles surmounted by a Deësis. The Virgin Episkepsis is painted beside the sanctuary on the north wall. The author proposes for these paintings of high quality a date about 1200.

42. Chatzidakis, *art. cit.* (note 18), p. 168, pl. XXVII, 5, 6. N.C. Moutsopoulos & G. Dimitrokallis, *Γεράκι, οι εκκλησίες του οικισμού*, Thessaloniki 1981, p. 134-135, fig. 148-152, twelfth century. Icons are also painted on the sanctuary barrier of Saint George in the citadel of Geraki, Chatzidakis, *ibidem*, pl. XXIX, 7, 8.

church of Saint George, Staro Nagoričino, restored in the early fourteenth century, the connection between the icons of the sanctuary barrier and the adjacent columns is more complex [43]. While icons of Saint George and the Virgin and Child fill the spaces above the panels to left and right of the central doors, on the adjacent walls there are not only a further icon of the Virgin and Child and another of Christ but also above them bust portraits of prophets. It is unlikely that these portraits of Daniel and Jacob were intended for veneration. As foretellers of the Incarnation, they are rather to be associated with the Annunciation represented above them. However they also act as a link between the formal decorative programme of the church and the icons for veneration painted below them.

The example of the White Church at Karan should also be adduced [44]. Here the Paraklesis is represented on the columns flanking the sanctuary barrier, while the entry to the diakonikon is entirely blocked by a painting of the Virgin Tricheiroussa. To her right on the wall is a painting of Christ and on the south wall, next to Christ and inclined towards him, is the Prodromos offering him his severed head. By the time that the White Church was decorated (1340-1342), the representation of Saint John the Baptist holding his severed head was commonplace in Serbian churches, but this detail was not included in Deësis compositions. The figure of Christ is therefore serving a double purpose: he is receiving the petition of the Mother of God and the head of the Prodromos. A further unusual detail is the representation of two Cherubim on the sanctuary screen. Babić wrote that they are "accompanying the Mother of God". This is indeed the case, but, since angels also participated in the terrestrial liturgy, they also provide a link with the mysteries being celebrated on the other side of the sanctuary barrier.

It is reasonable to suppose that, if immoveable icons were tolerated on the walls of the sanctuary barrier as early as the late twelfth century, moveable ones were also placed there. However the very fact that they were mobile makes it impossible to have any certainty about this. Various conjectures have been advanced about the so-called "intercolumnar" or "intercolumniated" icon. It might have been fixed there permanently; it might have been placed there for

43. Babić, *art. cit.* (note 41), p. 27-31, plan 7, fig. 24-26. V. Lazarev, Trois fragments d'épistyles peintes et le templon byzantin, *Δελτίον της Χριστιανικής Αρχαιολογικής Εταιρείας* Δ'Δ', 1964-1965, p. 138, suggests that the icons painted on the sanctuary barrier date from half a century later than the wall-paintings. This suggestion does not seem to have been taken up by Babić, nor by V. Djurić, *Vizantijske freske u Jugoslaviji*, Belgrade 1974, p. 51, 203 note 53.

44. Babić, *art. cit.*, p. 33, plan 10, fig. 19-20.

proskynesis on a feast-day; if it was a processional icon, it might have been kept there when it was not in use. A number of icons have been identified as "intercolumnar", but, of course, they are no longer in their original place[45].

The instructions for the lights to be placed before icons of the sanctuary barrier which occur in *Typika* are open to interpretation in spite of the fact that new editions of the more important ones have been published over the last two decades. For example, Epstein suggests that the icon of the Crucifixion associated with the sanctuary barrier at Bačkovo could well have belonged to the series of Twelve Feasts on the epistyle rather than be placed as a devotional icon between the columns[46]. It depends how one translates the Greek preposition in the phrase ἐν τοῖς καγκέλοις. However the two icons which are then mentioned in the *Typikon* of Saints John the Baptist and George must surely have been placed between the columns and not on the architrave.

The inventory of the monastery of the Mother of God *tis Koteinis* near Philadelphia includes five unnamed icons ἐν τῷ τέμπλῳ and others of the Feasts εἰς τὸ αὐτὸ τέμπλον. The icons of Feasts would have obviously been placed on the architrave[47]. For the others, it depends again how one translates the Greek preposition. Epstein finds it difficult to envisage five icons as "intercolumniated". Her point is a good one; they could well have made up a Deësis with two angels. Yet five icons *could* be "intercolumniated" if one was placed above the Holy Doors like the icon of the Presentation of the Virgin in the church of Saints Constantine and Helena, Ohrid[48].

Finally Epstein offers an original reconstruction of the Encleistra of Saint Neophytus near Paphos[49]. She places the two processional icons of the Paraklesis on stands outside the sanctuary. Since such an emplacement can be neither demonstrated nor refuted, we are obliged to accept that at present only hypotheses, often conflicting, can be formulated about "intercolumniated" icons.

It is possible to write with more assurance about epistyle icons, at

45. Chatzidakis, *art. cit.* (note 18), p. 182-186; K. Weitzmann, Icon Programmes of the 12th and 13th Centuries at Sinai, *Δελτίον της Χριστιανικής Αρχαιολογικής Εταιρείας* Δ' ΙΒ', 1984 (published 1986), p. 86-94.

46. Epstein, *art. cit.* (note 14), p. 21-22. Her translation is not exact. See now P. Gautier, Le typikon du sébaste Grégoire Pakourianos, *REB* 42, 1984, p. 73 lines 887-891. Even Gautier, by a slip of the pen, translates as Resurrection, not Crucifixion!

47. Epstein, *art. cit.*, p. 22; S. Eustratiades, Ἡ ἐν Φιλαδελφείᾳ Μονὴ τῆς ὑπεραγίας Θεοτόκου τῆς Κοτεινῆς, *Ἑλληνικά* 3, 1930, p. 332.

48. G. Subotić, *Sveti Konstantin i Jelena u Ohridu*, Belgrade 1971, p. 48-49, pl. 50.

49. Epstein, *art. cit.* (note 14), p. 19, fig. 7-8.

least about those which were painted together on a single beam. Usually, but not invariably, each scene was set in an arcade, a curious reminiscence, perhaps, of antique art, for the scenes from the Life of Endymion on the lid of a sarcophagus in the Metropolitan Museum, New York, are also set as if under an arcade (figure 6). Beside the Deësis, scenes from the Life of a saint could be represented on an epistyle beam, presumably placed before the entrance to a chapel dedicated to the saint in question[50]. However by far the greatest number of surviving Byzantine epistyles are decorated with the Great Feasts. Since quite a number of these epistyle beams has been published over the last two decades, it is worth drawing up a list of them, before attempting to explain why the Great Feasts were represented on epistyle beams.

Weitzmann has recently published a reconstruction of four such epistyle beams. All are on Mount Sinaï and all would date to the period between the early twelfth and early thirteenth century.

1. Two fragments, one in the chapel of Saint George and the other in the chapel of Saints Constantine and Helena in the principal church[51].

2. Four fragments reassembled and used as an epistyle in the Lower Panagia chapel[52].

3. Three fragments of which the central one, including a Deësis, is in the chapel of Saints Constantine and Helena mentioned above, while the two outer fragments are in the Upper Panagia chapel[53].

4. Three fragments (?) in the Upper Panagia chapel, on one of which the Last Supper is represented[54].

On all four of these epistyles the Twelve conventional Feasts are represented. Two other complete epistyle beams are somewhat different.

5. The beam in the church of the Panagia Theoskepastis, Kalopanagiotis, Cyprus has two rows of scenes. Besides the Twelve Feasts there are ten other scenes from Christ's Passion including the Last

50. The Eustratius beam has long been known, G. & M. Sotiriou, *Εικόνες της μονής Σινά*, Athens 1956-1958, I, fig. 103-111, II, p. 109-110; K. Weitzmann, *The Icon*, London 1978, p. 78, pl. 20; Idem, Illustrations to the Lives of the Five Martyrs of Sebaste, *DOP* 33, 1979, p. 109-110, fig. 28-29; *Sinaï, Treasures of the Monastery of Saint Catherine*, edited K.A. Manafis, Athens 1990, p. 152-153, fig. 20-22. For Saint Nicolas, Weitzmann, *art. cit.* (note 45), p. 68-69, fig. 3. For Saint John the Baptist, P. Gautier, La Diataxis de Michel Attaliate, *REB* 39, 1981, p. 89, lines 1195-1196.

51. Weitzmann, *art. cit.* (note 45), p. 65; Sotiriou, *op. cit.* (note 50), I, fig. 87-94, II, p. 102-105.

52. Weitzmann, *ibidem*, p. 71-75, fig. 4-7.

53. *Ibidem*, p. 75-80, fig. 8-14; *Sinaï op. cit.* (note 50), p. 162-163, fig. 31-33.

54. Weitzmann, *ibidem*, p. 82-86, fig. 15-17.

Supper. A date in the fourteenth or fifteenth century has been proposed for it[55].

6. A curious beam in the Museum of Verria, which is, apparently, complete, is decorated with six Feasts in the following order: Annunciation, Nativity, Presentation, Raising of Lazarus, Dormition, Ascension[56].

Other fragments of epistyle beams, incomplete and sometimes dispersed, have been identified.

7. Two pieces on Mount Sinaï, one in the Old Library and the other in a side chapel of the principal church. The first has two scenes from the infancy of the Mother of God, followed by the Annunciation, Nativity and Presentation. The other has the Baptism and Transfiguration to one side and the Raising of Lazarus and the Entry to Jerusalem to the other side of a Deësis. The rest is missing[57].

8. Four pieces of an epistyle, in varying conditions of preservation, are at Vatopedi, Mount Athos. On the first are two scenes from the infancy of the Mother of God, on the second the Annunciation and probably the Nativity, on the third the Raising of Lazarus and Entry to Jerusalem either side of a Great Deësis and on the fourth the Crucifixion and Descent from the Cross. The rest is missing[58].

9. Two fragments in the Great Lavra, portraying the Baptism and the Dormition, together with two fragments in the Hermitage, Sankt Peterburg, portraying the Anastasis and Pentecost, can be identified as having once belonged to the same epistyle beam[59].

10. One fragment in the Hermitage, portraying the Transfiguration, and another in a private collection portraying the Raising of Lazarus, can also be identified as having once belonged to the same epistyle beam[60].

11. Nor should be omitted the six enamels now incorporated into the Pala d'oro, Venice. Epstein has demonstrated that, with the addition of six other Feasts and a Deësis, they would fit the available space for an epistyle in the church of the Pantocrator, Constanti-

55. *Βυζαντινές εικόνες της Κύπρου*, exhibition catalogue, edited A. Papageorgiou & D. Mouriki, Athens 1976, n° 31, p. 88-89.

56. *Byzantine and Post-Byzantine Art*, catalogue of exhibition, Athens 1985, n° 96 (entry by M. Chatzidakis).

57. Weitzmann, *art. cit.* (note 45), p. 70; Sotiriou, *op. cit.* (note 50), I, fig. 95-102, II, p. 105-109; *Sinaï*, *op. cit.* (note 50), p. 156-157, fig. 25-27.

58. M. Chatzidakis, Εικόνες επιστυλίου από το Άγιο Όρος, *Δελτίον τῆς Χριστιανικῆς Αρχαιολογικῆς Εταιρείας* Δ' Δ', 1964, p. 377-382, reprinted *Studies in Byzantine Art and Archeology* XVII, Variorum, London 1972.

59. *Ibidem*, p. 397-398; Lazarev, *art. cit.* (note 43), p. 117-119.

60. Chatzidakis, *ibidem*, p. 398-399; V. Lazarev, *Storia della pittura bizantina*, Turin 1967, p. 330.

nople, to which, it was believed in the fifteenth century, they originally belonged [61].

Although all these epistyle beams have to be dated on stylistic grounds, there is corrobative evidence that by the end of the eleventh century icons of the Twelve Feasts were placed on the sanctuary screen. However the texts do not say explicitly that they constituted a single beam. So far as I am aware there are three such texts:

1. In Pakourianos's *Typikon* for Bačkovo (1081): Πρὸς δὲ καὶ ἔμπροσθεν τῶν δεσποτικῶν Δώδεκα Ἑορτῶν... κανδῆλαι ἀπτέσθωσαν δώδεκα [62].

2. In the inventory of Xylourgou (1142): τέμπλον... ἔχον τὰς δεσποτικὰς ἑορτάς [63].

3. In the inventory of the church of the Mother of God *tis Koleinis* (1247): Εἰς τὸ αὐτὸ τέμπλον αἱ ιβʹ ἑορταὶ μικρὰ εἰκονίσματα τῶν βασιλικῶν ἑορτῶν [64].

Other references to icons of the Great Feasts do not mention the sanctuary screen.

4. In the will of Eusthatius Boilas (1059), there is a reference to ὑλογραφίες χρουσὲς διάφορες τριάκοντα ἔχοντας δεσποτικὰς ἑορτὰς καὶ διαφόρων ἁγίων [65]. These icons could have been destined to be displayed for public veneration on the appropriate feast.

5. In the will of Saint Christodoulos of Patmos (1093), there is a reference to ἑτέρα εἰκὼν δίπτυχος ἔχουσα τὰς δεσποτικὰς ἑορτάς [66]. Such a diptych would have been intended for private devotion.

It is evident from the surviving epistyle beams that there was a canonical series of Twelve Feasts of the Lord as early as the twelfth century, although others, notably from the Passion cycle or from the infancy of the Mother of God could be added. They were: the Annunciation, Nativity, Presentation, Baptism, Transfiguration, Raising of

61. EPSTEIN, *art. cit.* (note 14), p. 4-5, fig. 1; G. LORENZO, *La Pala d'oro di San Marco*, Milan 1965, fig. 42-47.

62. GAUTIER, *ed. cit.* (note 46), p. 73 lines 895-897; cf. p. 121 line 1687.

63. P. LEMERLE, etc., *Actes de Saint-Pantéléèmôn*, Paris 1982, p. 74 line 23.

64. EUSTRATIADES, *ed. cit.* (note 47), p. 332.

65. P. LEMERLE, Le Testament d'Eusthatios Boilas, *Cinq études sur XI^e siècle byzantin*, Paris 1977, p. 24 lines 136-137.

66. MM, VI, p. 84 line 3. The Twelve Feasts were also represented in silver on the doors of the Chalkoprateia, according to Nicetas Choniates, MILLER, *art. cit.* (note 75), p. 36. Alexius I Comnenus had them melted down to mint coinage. See also J. SAKKELION, Documents inédits tirés de la bibliothèque de Patmos. 1. Décret d'Alexis Comnène portant déposition de Léon métropolitain de Chalcédoine, *BCH* 2, 1878, p. 106; F. DÖLGER, *Regesten der Kaiserurkunden des oströmischen Reiches*, II, Munich 1925, nº 1130 (January 1086). P. STEPHANOU, Le procès de Léon de Chalcédoine, *OCP* 9, 1943, p. 14, wrote that the doors were of gold.

Lazarus, Entry to Jerusalem, Crucifixion, Anastasis, Ascension, Pentecost and Dormition.

The notion that some feasts were more important than others emerged very early. However, before tracing their development, it should be remarked that the word feast, in our modern liturgical sense, is not always an exact translation of the Byzantine word ἑορτή. From the time of Eusebius this term was regularly applied to Christ's Passion [67]. Subsequently the Crucifixion was regularly included, under various names, in lists of important feasts. Consequently some such expression as the French *temps fort liturgique* might convey the meaning of ἑορτή more accurately.

For the superiority of some of these *temps forts*, there was general agreement. In the *De vita Constantini*, Pentecost is described as a very great feast [68]. The Annunciation, in the homily spuriously attributed to Athanasius, is described as μία τῶν δεσποτικῶν πρώτη τε καὶ πάνσεπτος ἑορτή [69].

A list of *temps forts liturgiques* occurs in the *Apostolic Constitutions* (ca 380): the Nativity, Epiphany (Baptism), the Passion and Resurrection, with plenty of instructions as to the way in which these solemnities should be observed, such as would be taken up later in monastic *Typika* [70]. However, the earliest "symbolic" list is in a spurious homily attributed to John Chrysostom (actually Proclus?), later cited by Hamartolus [71]. The list contains seven feasts: the Annunciation, Nativity, Epiphany, Πάθους ἡμέρα, Anastasis, Ascension. It terminates with the Resurrection of the dead, corresponding to the seventh day of the Creation. The Presentation is explicitly excluded ἥτις οὐκ ἔστιν ἐναριθμουμένη ταῖς Δεσποτικαῖς ἑορταῖς.

The list of ten feasts which is given by John of Euboea in his homily *In conceptione Deiparae* is slanted in order to give prominence to those in honour of the Mother of God, beginning with her Conception and Nativity before passing to Christ's Nativity, the Presentation, Transfiguration, τὸ ζωηφόρον πάθος, Easter (τὸ Πάσχα τῆς ἀειζώου ἀναστάσεως), Ascension, Pentecost, αὗται οὖν εἰσιν αἱ ἑορταί [72]. The Dor-

67. Eusebius of Caesarea, *Histoire ecclésiastique* (*CPG* 3495), I, edited G. Bardy, Paris 1952, II xvii 21, p. 77.

68. Idem, *De vita Constantini* (*CPG* 3496), 54, *PG* 20, 1220[b].

69. Athanasius, *In Annuntiationem Deiparae* (*BHG* 1161k, *CPG* 2269), *PG* 28, 917[b].

70. *Les constitutions apostoliques* (*CPG* 1730), edited M. Metzger, II, Paris 1986, p. 247-261.

71. John Chrysostom, *In Ascensionem Domini* 4 (*CPG* 4534), *PG* 52, 799-802; J.L. de Aldama, *Repertorium Pseudochrysostomicum*, Paris 1965, n° 52, p. 197; George Hamartolus, *ed. cit.* (note 19) II, p. 626 line 11 - 628 line 12; *PG* 110, 777[b-c].

72. John of Euboea, *Homilia in Conceptionem Deiparae* (*BHG* 1117, *CPG* 8135), *PG* 96, 1473[c], 1476[a-b], 1497[b]; D. Stiernon, Jean d'Eubée, *Dictionnaire de spiritualité* 8, col. 147.

mition is mentioned at the end, but it is excluded as occurring after Pentecost, "the last of the Great Feasts".

John of Euboea limited his list to ten, corresponding to the Ten Commandments. A full list of twelve occurs first in the poem attributed to both John Mauropous and Theodore Prodromos [73]. If the latter attribution is correct, it cannot be earlier than the twelfth century. It differs from the series of scenes painted on epistyles, in that it includes the Naming of Christ (Circumcision) but excludes the Dormition. This is curious, because the Naming of Christ was rarely represented in Byzantine art [74], while the Dormition was already being represented on epistyle beams in the twelfth century. Only much later is the canonical list attested in the literary sources [75].

These lists have not been obviously influenced by liturgical mystagogy, even less by theological considerations. That the number of Great Feasts should be fixed at seven, because the Creation lasted seven days, or at ten because there were Ten Commandments (or ten phrases in the Lord's Prayer), suggests that they belong rather to the genre of popular piety.

Yet the Great Feasts were an essential element in the liturgical calendar of the Byzantine Church and celebrated with special solemnity. They may well have originated in Palestine, corresponding to the theophanies of Christ. Possibly their iconography can be traced back to representations of them in Palestinian sanctuaries built in their honour. Nevertheless, they were only a selection from the vast repertory of Christological scenes. They recurred regularly in Byzantine church decorative programmes but not as a fixed series. Kitzinger has registered only one church where the scenes from Christ's

73. JOHN MAUROPOUS, *PG* 120, 1197; THEODORE PRODROMOS, *PG* 133, 1123. H. HORÄNDNER, edited, THEODOROS PRODROMOS, *Historische Gedichte*, Vienna 1974, nº 127, p. 47, considers that the attribution of this poem to Theodore is authentic, in which case it must be a twelfth-century composition, since Theodore died *ca* 1166.

74. Ch. A. ISERMEYER, Beschneidung Christi, *Lexikon der christlichen Ikonographie* 5, 270-273.

75. Most scholars simply cite Ducange's transcription of Xanthopoulos's poem (*sub verbo* ἑορτή). E. KITZINGER, Reflections on the Feast Cycle in Byzantine Art, *CA* 36, 1988, p. 68 note 6, goes rather further. He refers to another version of the poem by Xanthopoulos, transcribed by E. MILLER, Fragment inédit de Nicétas Choniate relatif à un fait numismatique, *Revue numismatique*, n. s., 11, 1886, p. 38, after Bibliothèque impériale de Paris, *cod.* 343, f. 111. Because it is relatively inaccessible, I transcribe it: Εὐαγγελισμὸν καὶ Θεοῦ γένναν ὅρα / τὴν ὑπαπαντὴν καὶ τὸ βάπτισμα πάλιν / ὅρος τὸ Θαβὼρ καὶ Λάζαρον ἐξ ᾎδου / τὰ τῆς νίκης σύσσημα καὶ σταυροῦ ξύλον / Ἀνάστασιν σκόπει δὲ καὶ λῆψιν ἄνω / χύδιν τε τοῦ Πνεύματος, ἔξοδου κόρης. E. MILLER, *Manueli Philae Carmina*, Paris 1855 (reprinted Amsterdam 1967), includes various poems in honour of the Great Feasts (dating from the first half of the thirteenth century), notably nº 24, p. 9-10, Εἰς εἰκόνα μουσείου ἔχουσαν τὰς δώδεκα ἑορτάς.

life are limited to the Twelve Feasts, the Panagia Amasgon at Monagri, Cyprus [76]. The number could vary considerably, from thirty-two in the old church at Tokalì, Cappadocia [77], to seventeen at Kurbinovo, where, however, all Twelve Feasts are included [78]. Kitzinger is surely right when he writes that the notion of Twelve Feasts or a festival cycle did not originate in Byzantine church decoration. The late Otto Demus was no doubt responsible for propagating this idea [79]. Even in his last great study, that of the mosaics of San Marco, he wrote that "these scenes are often conceived as a Feast cycle, arranged according to their recurring sequence in the course of the ecclesiastical year" [80]. Yet Byzantine art historians know well that, even if the Christological scenes in middle Byzantine churches were not always set out in biographical order, they were *never* set out in the order of the liturgical calendar.

To find such scenes — and notably of the Great Feasts — set out in the order of the calendar, one would have to look for them in manuscripts organised in this way, such as Lectionaries or Menologia. However, such a search is not immediately rewarding, and could finally lead only to negative results. Not only do lectionaries often contain, when they are illuminated, many other scenes, but, even when these scenes are limited to the Great Feasts, they are selective. Weitzmann has suggested that, in such cases, the Feasts chosen for illustration were those celebrated with special solemnity according to the *Typikon* of the monastery to which the Lectionary was destined [81].

It is quite possible that a series of stereotypes was made for the iconography of the Great Feasts in the tenth century, but also for other Christological scenes. In consequence, there is no evident reason for supposing that the emergence of a canonical series of Great Feasts

76. KITZINGER, *art. cit.*, p. 53; S. BOYD, The Church of Panagia Amasgou, Monagri, Cyprus and Its Wall-Paintings, *DOP* 28, 1974, p. 292-309.

77. A. W. EPSTEIN, *Tokali kilise*, Washington 1986, p. 60-65.

78. L. HADERMANN-MISGUICH, *Kurbinovo*, Brussels 1975, p. 94-186.

79. O. DEMUS, *Byzantine Mosaic Decoration*, London 1947, p. 22-26; T. MATHEWS, The Sequel to Nicaea II in Byzantine Church Decoration, *Perkins Journal*, 1988, p. 11.

80. O. DEMUS, *The Mosaics of San Marco in Venice*, I 1, London/Chicago 1984, p. 243.

81. For example, K. WEITZMANN, Das Evangeliar im Skevophylakion zu Lavra, *Seminarium Kondakovium* 8, 1936, p. 83-98, reprinted, *Byzantine Liturgical Psalters and Gospels*, Variorum, London 1980. WEITZMANN also reconstructs a "canonical" lectionary, A Tenth-Century Lectionary, a Lost Masterpiece of the Macedonian Renaissance, *RESEE* 9, 1971, p. 617-640.

is to be linked to the development of the Lectionary and its illustration[82].

The explanation why a biographical cycle for Christ, from which the Twelve Feasts were selected, was introduced into the decorative scheme of Byzantine churches is best sought in their relationship to the text of the liturgy *per se* and its mystagogical interpretation. As Spieser has recently pointed out, Gabriel Millet realised this long ago[83]. Unfortunately Demus's masterly synthesis of Middle Byzantine church programmes, incorporating a festival cycle, led subsequent art historians astray. Many passages of the liturgy contain an explicit mention of one or other of Christ's redemptive acts. Taken as a whole, the liturgy is a re-enactment of Christ's mission of salvation. Taken in detail, one or other of the events in Christ's life could be referred to a specific moment of the liturgy. Grabar showed how this method was applied by the erudite illuminator of the liturgical roll Stavrou 109[84]. Spieser has shown that Grabar's analysis of this unique manuscript can be carried even further[85].

Kitzinger has written that "a precise definition of what constitutes a festival cycle is not possible"[86]. This is certainly true, because a festival cycle never existed, only a biographical cycle for Christ. However, the Twelve Feasts of the Lord certainly existed, but not in church decorative programmes. It is necessary to distinguish in Byzantine tradition between monumental and devotional art. The same subjects recur in both, but their organisation is different.

Kitzinger, in fact, provides much of the necessary material for tracing the origins of the Twelve Feasts as a devotional subject back to Early Christian objects like the ampullae brought back as souvenirs from the Holy Land[87]. They were decorated with some of the scenes which occur in the canonical series of Great Feasts. Other objects, notably icons, ivories and steatites, were decorated with a selection of scenes from Christ's life, not necessarily the canonical Feasts. Millet noted some examples like the mosaic icon at Vatopedi, Mount Athos, on which the Crucifixion is surrounded by twelve scenes[88], the metal

82. J.C. ANDERSON, *The New York Cruciform Lectionary*, University Park, Pennsylvania 1992, p. 1-12, summarizes the problems of the origins and development of the Byzantine lectionary.

83. SPIESER, *art. cit.* (note 9), p. 584 note 50; G. MILLET, *Recherches sur l'iconographie de l'Évangile*, Paris 1916, p. 15-30.

84. A. GRABAR, Un rouleau liturgique constantinopolitain et ses peintures, *DOP* 8, 1954, p. 161-199.

85. SPIESER, *art. cit.* (note 9), p. 584-586.

86. KITZINGER, *art. cit.* (note 75), p. 57.

87. *Ibidem*, p. 58-67.

88. MILLET, *op. cit.* (note 83), fig. 2.

icon of the Virgin and Child surrounded with sixteen scenes, some from the infancy of the Mother of God, in the State Museum Tbilissi[89], the Barberini diptych in the Kaiser Friedrich Museum, Berlin[90], and the mosaic diptych in Florence[91]. Weitzmann has called attention to one such icon at Sinaï[92] and Kitzinger to another[93]. It is not necessary to give an extensive list of these objects. It suffices to recall that the genre existed earlier than the first known epistyle beam with the Twelve Feasts, for example a diptych in the Hermitage, Sankt Peterburg, dated to about 1000[94], and continued much later, for example the Cretan School icon of the Deësis surrounded by ten feasts (the Raising of Lazarus and Pentecost were omitted) in Sarajevo[95].

There is a sure *terminus ante quem* for the representation of the Twelve Feasts on the epistyle, since such icons are mentioned by Pakourianos in his *Typikon* of 1081. Evidence that they were introduced earlier is virtually non-existent. Assuredly Weitzmann has suggested that the well-known tenth-century icon of the Footwashing at Sinaï was originally destined for an epistyle, and some scholars have accepted his suggestion[96]. However, there are reasons for being sceptical. One is that the Footwashing hardly ever appears elsewhere among the Feasts. Another is that the icon is unique in its genre; consequently there is no strong argument for connecting it with an epistyle. On the other hand, there is a reference in the *Typikon* of the Pantocrator to an icon of the Footwashing in the left apse, before which a lamp was to be kept permanently alight[97].

As for the reason why the Twelve Feasts were represented on the

89. MILLET, *op. cit.*, fig. 3; K. WEITZMANN, etc., *Ikone*, Belgrade 1981, p. 103; W. SEIBT & T. SANIKIDZE, *Schatzkammer Georgien*, exhibition catalogue, Vienna 1981, nº 31.

90. MILLET, fig. 4.

91. D. TALBOT RICE, *The Art of Byzantium*, London 1959, pl. XXXVI-XXXVII, p. 336; LAZAREV, *op. cit.* (note 60), p. 368, 413 note 27, pl. 489, 490. I have been unable to trace the South Kensington (Victoria & Albert Museum?) ivory diptych, MILLET, p. 22. It does not figure in D. TALBOT RICE, *Masterpieces of Byzantine Art*, exhibition catalogue, London 1958.

92. WEITZMANN, *art. cit.* (note 38), fig. 5; SOTIRIOU, *op. cit.* (note 50), I, fig. 57-61, II, p. 75-77.

93. KITZINGER, *art. cit.* (note 75), fig. 1. See also *Sinaï*, *op. cit.* (note 50), p. 157-159, fig. 28; p. 198-199, fig. 72.

94. *Ikone*, *op. cit.* (note 89), p. 38.

95. *Ibidem*, p. 321.

96. K. WEITZMANN, *The Monastery of Saint Catherine at Mount Sinaï, The Icons*, I, Princeton 1976, nº B 56, p. 91-93; CHATZIDAKIS, *art. cit.* (note 18), p. 164, 173, pl. XXVI 1, XXXIV.

97. P. GAUTIER, Le typikon du Christ Sauveur Pantocrator, *REB* 32, 1974, p. 37 line 145.

epistyle, it seems fairly clear. They provided the laity with a subject for meditation while the liturgy was being celebrated on the other side of the sanctuary barrier. The parallel with the practice of Roman Catholic lay people reciting the rosary during the celebration of the Mass is close. Fifteen mysteries were proposed for their meditation, seven of which correspond to the Byzantine Feasts. The eleventh century would seem appropriate for the introduction of the Feasts on the epistyle, because it was at this time that Eucharistic scenes became the focal point of apse decoration [98]. The contemplation of these scenes was reserved to the clergy, since, like the liturgy itself, they were not visible to the laity.

As I have noted earlier, there was sometimes contamination of the decoration of the sanctuary screen, whether from the overall decorative programme of the church as at Staro Nagoričino or from the liturgy itself as at Karan. An analogous contamination may sometimes be observed on the epistyle beam, when the Last Supper [99] or the Communion of the Apostles accompanied the Twelve Feasts [100].

In conclusion it may be affirmed that the area in the immediate vicinity of the altar was certainly significant programmatically in the Byzantine church, but in a special way, because the sanctuary screen and the adjacent area were the focal point of lay piety. Lay people could approach the screen to pray and to venerate the icons placed there or nearby. During the execution of the liturgy inside the sanctuary, they could contemplate the Deësis and the Great Feasts, represented on the architrave or the epistyle. These iconographical themes recalled the necessity of the intercession of the saints and the major events of Christ's redemptive mission which were being re-enacted behind the screen.

It might be asked whether the same interpretation should be given to the scene of the Annunciation painted on the Holy Doors [101]. It

98. Walter, *op. cit.* (note 13), p. 241.

99. Weitzmann, *art. cit.* (note 54), p. 82, fig. 16.

100. Chatzidakis, *art. cit.* (note 18), p. 173-174; Sotiriou, *op. cit.* (note 50), I, fig. 49, II, p. 66-68; M. Miljković-Pepek, Une icône de la Communion des Apôtres, *Χαριστήριον εις Α. Κ. Ορλάνδον*, III, Athens 1966, p. 395-409.

101. Our knowledge of the iconography of Byzantine Holy Doors has hardly advanced since the publication of the studies by A. Grabar, Deux notes sur l'histoire de l'iconostase d'après des monuments de Yougoslavie, *ZRVI* 7, 1961, p. 13-122, and by M. Ćorović-Ljubinković, *Srednjovekovni duborez u istočnim oblastima Jugoslavije*, Belgrade 1965. See however G. Subotić & J. Simonpetritis, L'iconostase et les fresques de la fin du xiv^{e} siècle dans le monastère de la Transfiguration aux Météores, *Actes du XV^{e} congrès international d'études byzantines*, II, *Art & archéologie, Communications*, Athens 1981, p. 754, fig. 3 (Holy Doors with the Annunciation and bust portraits of Saints Peter and Paul, dated ca. 1390).

seems unlikely. The Mother of God was the "door" through which salvation entered the world, while the Holy Doors gave the clergy access to the sanctuary in order to re-enact the mysteries of salvation. Later, notably in Russia, officiating bishops might be represented on the Holy Doors, an evidently clerical subject[102]. However, this was part of an enterprise which does not concern us here, the exploitation of the space provided by a sanctuary barrier, high and fully enclosed, to set out in detail all the stages of the divine providential plan[103].

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102. For example, the sixteenth-century doors in Novgorod Museum, D. LIKHACOV, etc., *Novgorod Icons, 12th-17th Century*, Leningrad 1980, n° 174, p. 319, or even earlier, the doors from Krivoje, Archangel (late 13th century?), V. PUCKO, Carskie vrata iz Krivečkog pogosta. K istorii altarnoj pregrady na Rusi, *Zbornik za likovne umetnosti* 11, 1975, p. 51-78; E. S. SMIRNOVA, *Živopis' velikogo Novgoroda*, Moscow 1976, n° 4, p. 166-170, 272. (Information kindly communicated by the Librarian of the Institute of Art History, Jagelloński University, Cracow.)

103. Ch. WALTER, *Le monde des icônes*, Geneva 1982, p. 168-178.

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Fig. 1. — Architrave. Byzantine Museum, Athens.



Fig. 2. — Rear of sanctuary barrier. Episkopi, Santorini.

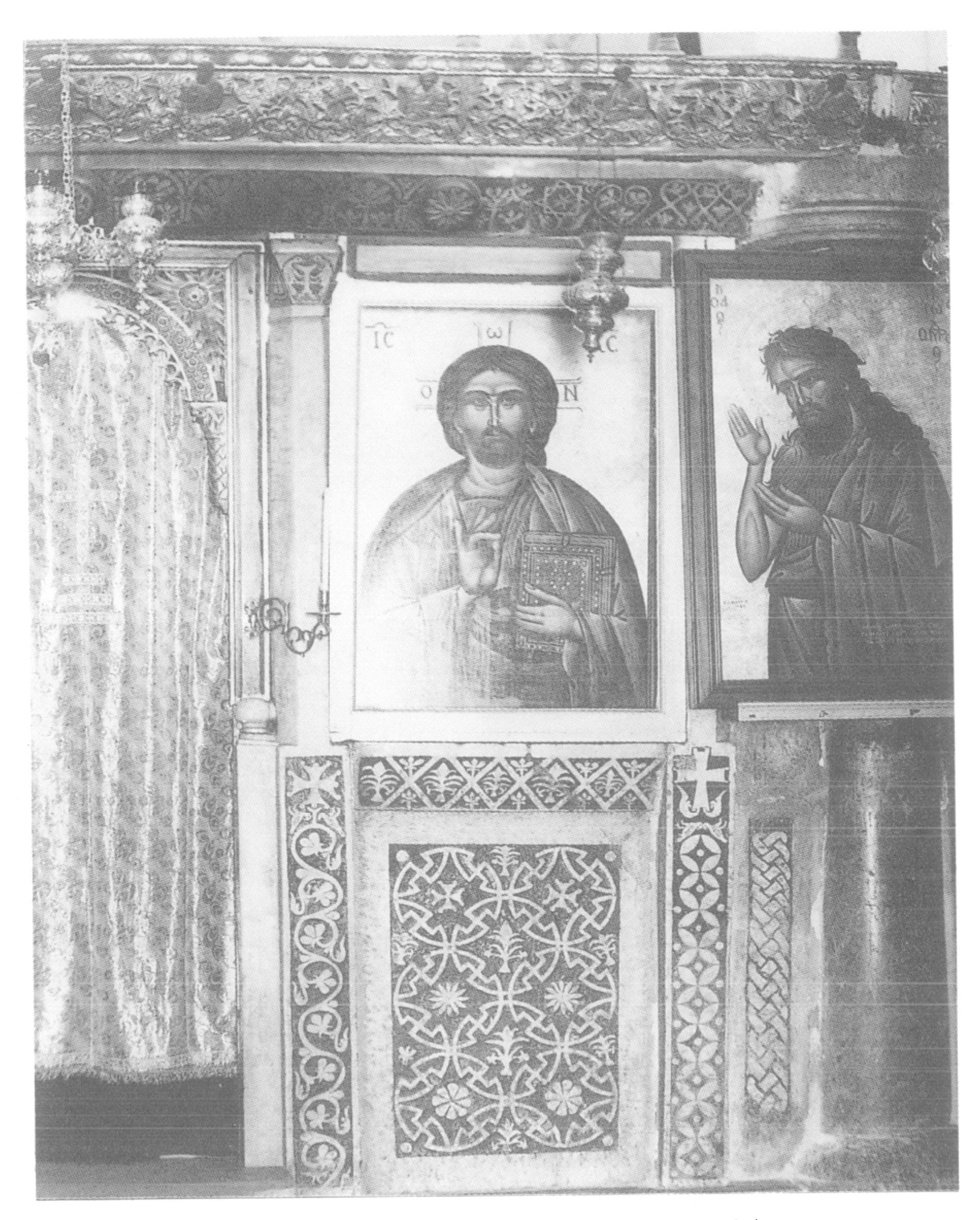


Fig. 3. — Sanctuary barrier. Episkopi, Santorini.

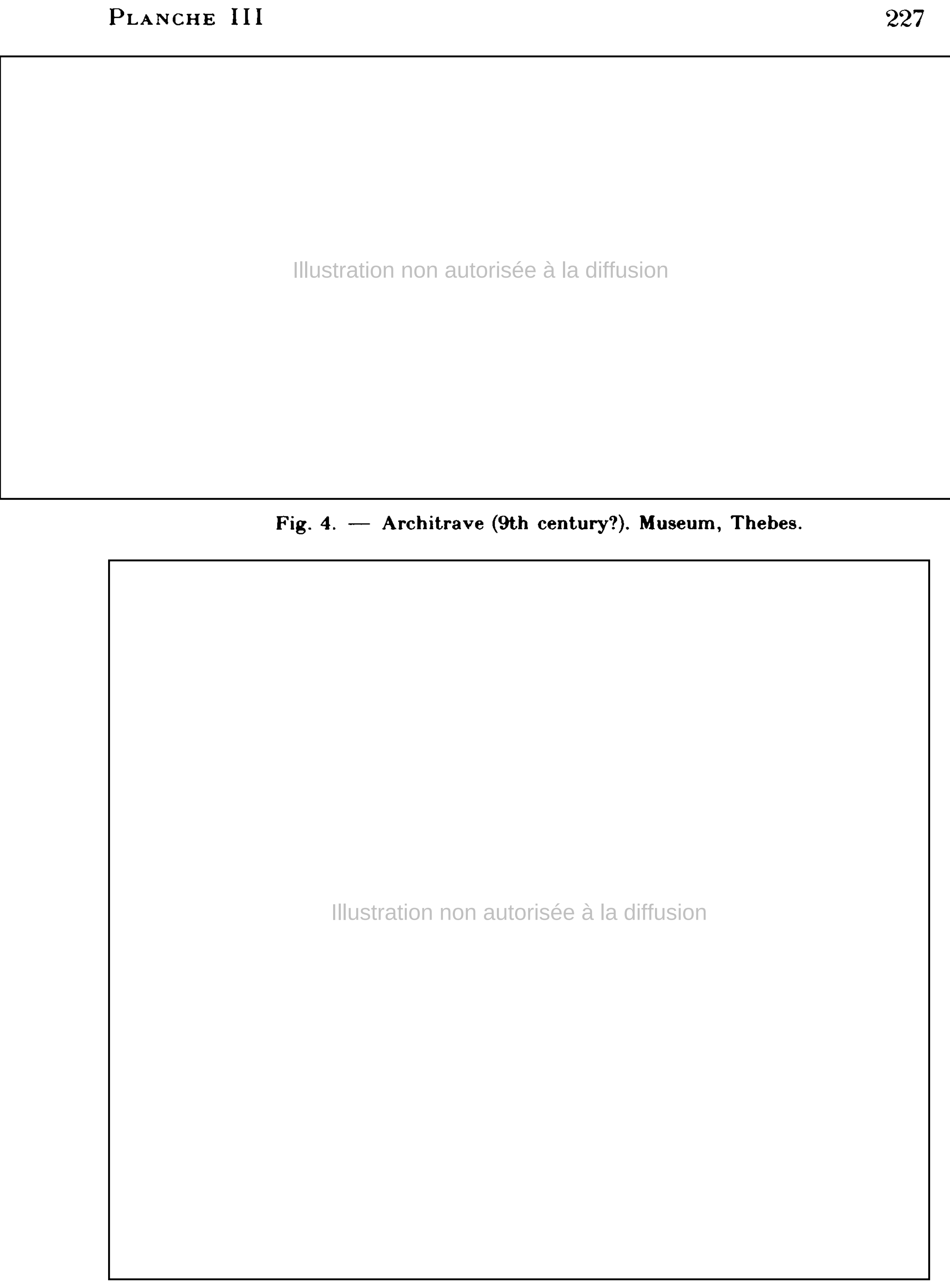


Fig. 4. — Architrave (9th century?). Museum, Thebes.

Fig. 5. — Architrave (13th century?). Museum, Thebes.

PLANCHE IV

Fig. 6. — Endymion sarcophagus. Metropolitan Museum, New York.